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ABSTRACT

For-profit schools are serviced by commercial companies whose primary goal is to raise student achievement to a designated level within a period specified by contract. Different school systems are discussed along with their positive and negative points. Questions related to possible issues are presented in each case for consideration. Reasons for using commercial companies in the educational arena are that they advocate providing a good education with less costly operations, they emphasize the free-enterprise system of economics where parents can choose their children's schools from among alternatives, they stress the importance of freedom to choose as is true in a democracy, they believe freedom of choice should be applied to the school-attendance arena, and they accept the idea that the economic and educational arenas have much in common, which is to optimize profit in business and in academic achievement of students. Disadvantages in using for-profit schools are that they emphasize the profit motive, they tend to cut down on teachers and support personnel to minimize overhead costs, and they pinpoint "failing schools" as a place of intervention. Questions are presented for consideration about the economic motives in teaching for profit purposes. (RT)

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ASSESSING FOR PROFIT SCHOOLS

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ASSESSING FOR PROFIT SCHOOLS

Dr. Marlow Ediger

For profit schools management systems have made their inroad into the educational arena. In the early 1970s, there also were commercial companies which offered their services in contract form to a school district. The commercial company would receive pay for students who achieved at a designated level as stated in the contract. The terms of the agreement were spelled out in the contract in terms of student achievement expectations and the time interval involved. The contracting company would receive pay for students only if they achieve up to what was stated in the contract. This was known as performance contracting. Commercial companies engaged in performance contracting

1. trained teachers according to their beliefs and philosophies.
2. emphasized they could help students to achieve at a higher rate than what was accomplished in the public schools.
3. stressed that student test scores would go up as a result of their intervention.
4. advocated that students would achieve more optimally with for profit schools as compared to public school students.
5. believe in competition between public school instruction and for profit schools (Ediger, 1988, p. 66).

Performance contracting soon went out of style due to complaints about their students being taught directly to items on the test. Test scores then rose sharply for students in the performance contracting group. Then too, with a pretest/post test research design, performance contracting students were pretested in very adverse situations, making for poor test results. With optimal testing conditions in the post test, student achievement soared when comparing the pretest with that of the post test. There are a plethora of ways to use to regulate how much an experimental group will achieve, such as performance contracting, when being compared with public school student achievement (Ediger, 1988, p. 66).

For Profit Schools and Students

For profit schools have come into being due to the criticisms made of a lack of student achievement in the public schools. There is a challenge here from commercial companies that they can "turn the public schools around." The free enterprise system has always emphasized competition as a way of challenging <u>what is</u> to <u>something better</u>. The market place economy is based on the economic model of consumers choosing which goods and services to buy, among different options, What is then purchased by consumers will survive on the market as compared to those items not purchased, as produced by a company or

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corporations. There is complete consumer freedom in making choices and selections. Whether the free enterprise system in buying goods and services applies to the educational system of teaching and learning can make for considerable debate.

There are available in different states ways of parents selecting which school their child is to attend, such as in the following:

1. open school enrollment. In Minnesota and in Iowa, for example, parents may choose the school their offspring is to attend, each within the borders of their respective state. No longer are parents limited then in sending their child to the neighborhood school. There are problems here with selecting a school removed from the local neighborhood, such as transporting their child to the chosen school, as well as having living accommodations for the offspring in the chosen area. But, the choices are there and the decisions may be made by parents.

Problems involved here in selecting a school based on educational achievement of the student, include the following:

a) the school being chosen for the wrong motive. A school may then be selected to assist the student to excel in competitive athletics or where cliques are involved.

b) the student being away from the parents during the school week or for a longer period of time (See Ediger, 2001, 22-26).

A School Within a School.

A local school may have several options to choose from in terms of an appropriate curriculum as perceived by parents. The options include diverse kinds and types of curricula. Perhaps, the curriculum chosen will harmonize with a student's preferred way and methods of learning. Thus, a student may

a) select to be in a basics school whereby the three r's (reading, writing, and arithmetic) receive major emphasis.

b) select a school which has an activity centered procedure of learning such as a hands on approach or a problem solving curriculum (Ediger and Rao, 2000, Chapter Six).

Magnet Schools

A magnet school encourages integration of diverse racial groups. Magnet schools are to have good teachers and support personnel. Course offerings should help students to choose, from among alternative classes, that which harmonizes best with a student's personal interests and abilities. Magnet schools may have just recently built structures, making the environment more pleasing to the student. A magnet school preference may not be available for many students, as they have been built largely in the urban setting. The appeal to attend a magnet school

is that it

a) has course offerings which may be based on a student's preferences such as having a strong emphasis upon science instruction.

b) has high quality teachers to amplify a student's personal achievements (Ediger and Rao, 2000, Chapter Twelve).

Vouchers.

The voucher system is usually turned down by voters during voting when elections are held. They can be very costly to implement. Milwaukee, Wisconsin, for example, has a voucher system for African American students who may then take the voucher money from the receiving school and attend a school of their choice. The choice may involve a parochial school, since there are few secular private schools. The receiving school is viewed by selected parents as being superior to the public schools. Usually, vouchers are used when the sending school, located in a poverty area, is rated as having low achievement and being a failing school. The parochial school may take in or refuse the application of a transfer student. Expelling a student from a private school due to misbehavior is also relatively easy. Handicapped students may not be accepted into a parochial school due to as lack of facilities and the incurred costs for their education. Generally, a handicapped student may cost three times as much to educate as compared to a normal child. Questions to be raised about the voucher system are the following:

1. is the money adequate from the receiving school, in voucher form, to pay for schooling in a private school? Generally, the discrepancy may be large here and may mean that the money received from the sending school is way below that charged by the receiving school. Then too, paying for transportation may involve quite a bit of money wish needs to be paid also, by the parents of the student planning to attend the private school.

2. will the church/state separation fail in being upheld when students use public school voucher money to attend a parochial school? (Ediger and Rao, 1996, Chapter Seven).

Charter Schools

Charter schools tend to be connected with the local public school. Money received for charter school operation comes from the public school budget of which they otherwise are a part. The charter school movement is quite strong and involves teachers and administrators agreeing to have separate classes from those of the public schools. The thinking here is that more optimal student achievement may come about with ambitions teachers and administrators planning a challenging

curriculum for learners than would traditionally be emphasized. The objectives, learning opportunities, and assessment procedures planned could be relatively free from the red tape which public schools need to endure. The red tape consists of state regulations and rules intended to up student achievement.

Charter schools need to be studied thoroughly with quality, not shoddy research, to ascertain their goodness or lack thereof in helping students to learn more. They do take money and facilities away from public school use. Questions to be raised abut the charter school movement are the following:

1. Why are charter schools not mandated to follow state regulations and rules if the they are considered detrimental?
2. Would charters do better in working toward student achievement if they are highly selective as to who is taught in their schools? Rather, the author would like to recommend that charters take the at risk, the ADHD, as well as handicapped students and become a laboratory school in providing models for teaching these students (See Ediger, 2000, 399-411).

Online Education

It is possible for many middle school and high school students to take courses on line (See Jones, et al, 2001). With computers being available in an increasing number of homes and schools, a student may then take some or all courses online. Online education may also be considered as an alternative type of schooling, separate from the pubic school environment. A student then may take all courses for high school graduation online. The student works by himself/herself to complete requirements with computer use. The required work is sent via e- mail to the university offering the online high school courses. Corrections are made and the online work is graded by the university professor. The student may work at his/her convenience in completing the high school requirements via e- mail. The student needs to be very responsible in persevering toward high school graduation when working online. The online courses need to be demanding and challenging. They need to be equivalent to what is expected of students in the high school setting. Questions which may be raised of online education are the following:

1. what happens to social development of the student when working alone on course work in the home setting continuously?
2. what happens to motivation factors when the student works by the self and there is no one to challenge the student toward higher achievement?

A good solution here might be for a student to take selected courses online, such as courses not available in the school curriculum.

Online courses may also provide for students whose learning style represents an intrapersonal philosophy whereby optimal achievement comes about when working individually on school related tasks.These also might be for highly ambitious students who can shoulder more course work during a given school year in high school. Online courses may also be taken by home bound students. Students may be permitted to take selected online courses in lieu of requirements needed for graduation. The home bound may have certain deficiencies which prohibit regular school attendance, such as school phobia, a devastating mental illness. This illness can truly be a burden for a teacher having a child of this situation in the classroom who flees the school on a very icy cold school day. At home, the child tends to exhibit rather normal behavior and might very well be of above average ability.

There are a plethora of alternatives available for high school students in place of following courses in a high school which require traditional attendance. To be sure, not all of the above named alternatives are available within a district, but may become increasingly so in the years to come. Vouchers may have a great obstacle to overcome with private schools being parochial, in most cases, and using money from the voucher may well be prohibited due to separation of church and state rulings by the Supreme Court.

Pros And Cons Of For Profit Schools

As is true of any innovation, there are advantages and disadvantages of a proposed new approach in teaching students. For profit school come in this category. Companies enter into the market when profit may be realized from any endeavor, including education. With the tremendous amount of money states invest in testing students, commercial companies are cashing in on the profits realized (See Educational Week, March 14, 2001). Teaching of students in any nation is an expensive enterprise and commercial companies have gained an entrance in gaining contracts from school boards to teach entire schools of students. Reasons given for having commercial companies come into the educational arenas and contracts are the following:

1. they advocate providing a good education with less costly operations.
2. they emphasize the free enterprise system of economics. Consumers may then choose which school is to be attended by their children. The choices are made from among alternatives, just as choices are made at the market place.
3. they stress the importance of freedom to choose as is true in a democracy. School attendance centers then should not be mandated.
4. they believe freedom of choice should be applied to the school

attendance arena.

5. they accept the idea that the economic and educational arenas have much in common and that is to optimalize profit in business and in academic achievement of students.

Each trend in educational thinking needs to emphasize a selected philosophy of instruction. Education achievement of students may then be compared to increased profit in the business world. For profit schools harmonize well with the measurement and testing movement in that student achievement can be measured through testing procedures just as profits in a business can be measured or determined with profits in dollars and cents.

Disadvantages Given in for Profit Schools

There are numerous disadvantages which may be given in the for profit schools movement. These include the following:

1. they emphasize the bottom line in the economic arena and that is the profit motive.
2. they tend to cut down on teachers and support personnel employed to minimize overhead costs.
3. they pinpoint "failing schools" as a place of intervention. These are schools located in the lower socio economic areas. Students have always achieved at a lower rate in impoverished areas as compared to suburbia.
4. they have made more inroads into urban as compared to rural and suburban schools.
5. they are not widely accepted at the present, but are making progress in obtaining more schools on a contractual basis

Questions which may be raised about economic motives in teaching for profit purposes include the following:

1. does the human mind work in the same direction as the business world with the ensuing analogy: measurement in sales made in the business world is similar to measurement of student academic achievement in school.
2. can for profit companies truly teach effectively with their background of experiences in the business world, not in curriculum, nor in the psychology and philosophy areas of teaching?
3. how sound are the measurement procedures in terms of validity and reliability in ascertaining achievement of for profit schools?
4. will for profit schools accept an adequate number of disadvantaged students from poor homes, handicapped students, and at

risk students in classroom teaching (See Winter and Kilpatrick, 2001)?

5. might quality unbiased research be conducted to compare for profit student achievement versus that of public school learners?

6. are human relations in for profit schools as good as or better than that of the public schools?

7. do teachers indicate equivalent motivation for teaching when contrasting for profit schools with public school teachers?

8. what provisions are made for inservice education in each of the two categories of schools?

9. are support services maintained adequately in for profit schools such as custodial, lunchroom, and guidance counseling, among others? Too frequently, these kinds of services are curtailed or short changed so that increased profit is available.

10. are there approaches or methods of research which will truly account for the many variables when for profit student achievement is compared with that of public school students?

Conclusion

There are many groups which may come in to improve students achievement in "failing schools." These schools in lower socio economic areas may lack

1. suitable buildings and facilities for teaching students.
2. suitable teaching materials and the tools of learning for students in order that teachers may do the job properly.
3. suitable support from parents who feel frustrated with student achievement in low socio economic areas.
4. suitable amounts of money to buy supplementary supplies to assist student learning.
5. suitable salaries for teachers to possess an appropriate life style in order to buy the necessities of life.
6. suitable environments for students to feel secure in an otherwise drug infested, heavily armed, and dangerous neighborhood.
7. suitable after school programs for students to enrich the self and complement the school curriculum.
8. suitable backing by the local school board and school administration to assist teachers and students to achieve as optimally as possible.
9. suitable student health insurance and adequate food, clothing, and shelter to make for positive living and quality school progress.
10. suitable test results in making comparisons between for profit schools student achievement versus public school achievement. Thus, for profit schools, too, must include in the head count those who are minorities, mentally retarded, and at risk students.

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